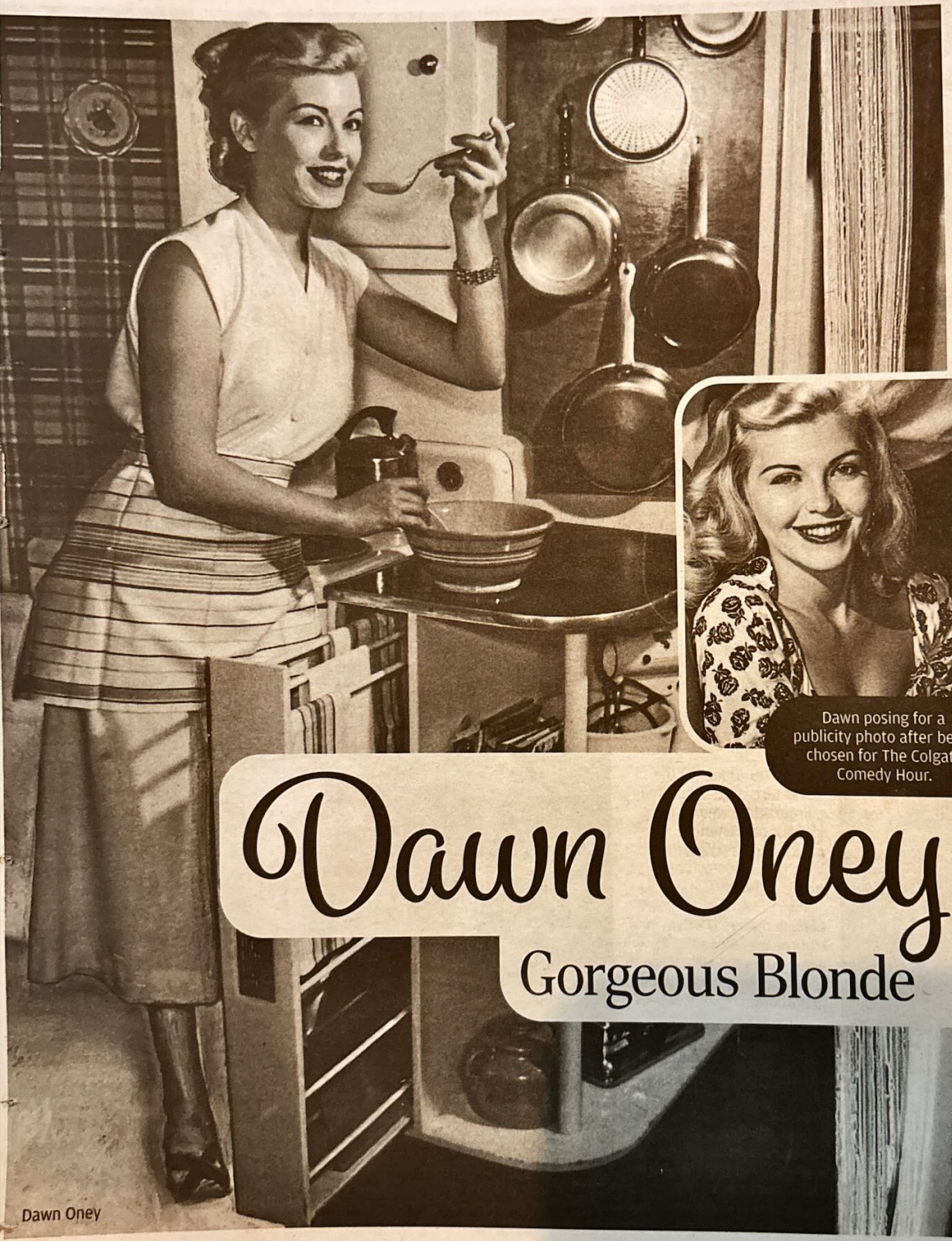
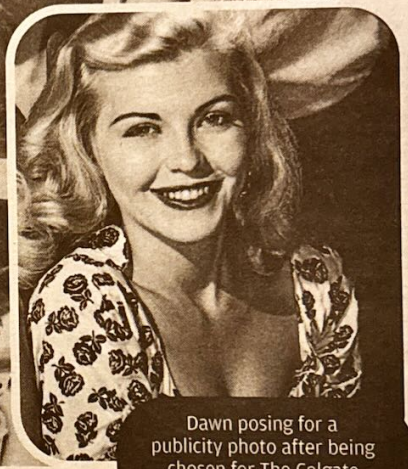


Dawn Oney



Dawn posing for a publicity photo after being chosen for The Colgate Comedy Hour.

Dawn Oney

Gorgeous Blonde

SAMUEL CLAESSON

Dawn Oney was perhaps one of the most gorgeous blondes in Hollywood, which is why it's surprising that she only appeared sparingly on camera and never got to speak. It's possible that her voice wasn't adequate for the movies. She certainly had the proper buildup as she did several pinups in popular magazines, like Eye, Tab, Frolic, and Show, while earning a good reputation according to fellow players such as Joan Pastin who described her as being lovely.

She was born on July 4, 1930, in Mankato, Minnesota, as Donna Mae Oney. After graduating high school, she worked as a secretary in nearby Minneapolis before marrying Carl Harvey Carlson. They had a child named Daniel, whom she'd later support after her divorce.

Her ambitions of stardom began after she started posing for artists at galleries and museums. It was an interesting job that paid the bills, but how she got to Hollywood was even more fascinating. She entered a contest in Modern Screen that was sponsored by Wald-Krasna Productions for an opportunity to appear in a film. She and several others won the contest and were flown to Hollywood to appear in *Size 12* (1952), but the production was put on hiatus and was ultimately canceled.

It wasn't entirely bad, though, as the studio promised the chosen starlets that they'd be recast in another film. Dawn knew that she needed to get work quickly, so she took some modeling work until entering a pageant held by NBC Studios. The judges, which included Groucho Marx and Jimmy Durante, deliberated for hours on August 20, 1953, before selecting six women to reign as T-Venuses: Angie Dickinson, Sue Casey, Suzanne Ames, Dona Cole, Mary Ann Edwards, and of course Dawn Oney. This guaranteed her regular appearances on *The Colgate Comedy Hour*, *The Eddie Cantor Show*, and *All-Star Revue* until Howard Hughes, who now had an interest in the aforementioned Wald-Krasna Productions, cast her in *Son of Sinbad* (1955, filmed in 1953) where she's seen beside Lili St. Cyr outside of the caliph's palace. She was cast in *The French Line* (1954), where she's seen waltzing with Gilbert Roland who sings "With a Kiss." Unfortunately, Hughes hired more women than the studio needed, and most of them, including Dawn, were dismissed after the filming concluded.

She didn't give up on the industry, like most of those women did, but rather entered several pageants hoping to get dis-

(left to right) Dawn Oney, Lili St. Cyr, Marvleen Prentice, Barbara Panders, and Marilyn Bonney in Son of Sinbad (1955).

The French Line (1954): [left to right] Sally McCloskey, Gloria Watson, Dawn Oney, Gilbert Roland, and Jane Russell.

Dawn Oney (left) with Tony Curtis and Jeff Chandler at Miss Universe event, July 19, 1954.

covered. One of the pageants was Miss 102, which won her an award of $10,000. She stayed with her parents in Billings, Montana, for a while to visit with her son and assess her career. It was a few weeks later that her parents mailed a photograph to the state's Chamber of Commerce for their annual pageant. Montana was one of the few states that held the contest using photographs rather than a formal in-person ceremony. Dawn was crowned Miss Montana of 1954 and was expected to win the title of Miss Universe because of her uncanny resemblance to Marilyn Monroe and winning a poll as the most popular of the contestants. She lost, which was an immense and devastating setback for her. Things got worse when later that year her mother died while visiting her.

She continued modeling and was a headliner at the annual Do-It-Yourself Show, which was especially enjoyable for her son Daniel because he modeled a lot of household supplies with his mother which put him in hundreds of newspapers across the country. Although she only posed at the event that year, the photographs taken were used in various advertisements until 1971.

Her last work, to my knowledge, was a provocative 8mm film titled *Gorgeous Blonde*, no surprise considering her curvaceous measurements of 36-23-35. She died on September 12, 2012, in Santa Ana, California, with the Orange County Register and Those Obscure Objects of Desire publishing obituaries on her behalf.